The conference did not make any recommendations as such. There were in-depth discussions about the spread of the infection, surveilance, blood safety, research activities, intervention strategies, networking with community-based organisations, risk factors in perinatal transmission; structural impediments to preventive and promotional strategies and the role of policy in effective prevention, education and care.

There were no specific recommendations relating to external assistance for national AIDS Control Programme, either in India or in any other part of the world.

Blindness due to Cataract

*315. DR. NAUNIHAL SINGH :
SHRI SANGH PRIYA GAUTAM :
Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that cataract-caused blindness is a major health problem in India: if so, the reasons therefor;

(b) the number of people awaiting cataract operation and how many operations are being conducted every year;

(c) the number of people that join the ranks of cataract patients every year;

(d) whether the growing life expectancy of the population aggravates to this problem, if so, in what manner;

(e) what steps Government have taken to contain this problem; and

(f) what are the details of major impediments to solve or minimise this problem ?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI B. SHANKARANAND) : (a) and (d) Yes, Sir. Cataract is mainly an age related phenomenon and increase in longevity and the relative inadequacies of ophthalmic services, particularly in remote areas has contributed to the problem.

(b) The backlog of cataract cases is estimated at 22 million. 1.6 million operations were conducted in 1992-93.

(c) The annual incidence of cataract induced blindness is estimated at 2 million.

(e) and (f) Under the National Programme for the Control of Blindness, strengthening of the ophthalmic infrastructure, establishment of District Blindness Societies and District Mobile Units has been taken up to facilitate eye camps. The financial outlays for the centrally sponsored blindness control programme have been increased substantially. The World Bank has been approached for assistance to support a project for the Control of Blindness in 7 States in the Country.

Throwing of Debris and Boulders into river Damodar

*316. SHRI S. S. AHLUWALIA :
Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS be pleased to state :

(a) Whether Government are aware that in the coalbelt region of Bihar and West Bengal in the open cast mining the debris and boulders are simply pushed into river Damodar which not only affects the pisciculture but also increases the sediment in the river and its reservoirs;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what remedial action Government propose to take in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH) : (a) to (c) Coal mining activities especially opencast mining will generate overburden including boulders/debris during excavation, depending on the stripping ratio. This is true in relation to opencast mining in Damodar basin of Bihar and West Bengal. The overburden is generally reclaimed through afforestation, soil stabilisation and partially utilised for reclamation of mined area. However during certain periods, the unstabilised overburden may get washed down and reach the nearby water courses causing siltation degrading the water quality. As per information furnished by the Bihar State Pollution Control Board, they have observed increased sediment load in Damodar river water, however no adverse report on pisciculture has been received by the State Board. Specific conditions are stipulated for all coal mining projects as part of the environmental clearance. They include afforestation of the overburden dump areas, use of overburden for land reclamation, soil stabilisation, control of air water pollution to standards prescribed by the State Boards etc. Implementation of these conditions is regularly monitored by the State/ Central agencies.